

## **Nomination of Associate Professor Veronica Martinez-Matsuda For the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Teaching Excellence**

**Nominator:** George R. Boyer, Senior Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, ILR School, and Director of Teaching, ILR

It is my pleasure to nominate Veronica Martinez-Matsuda, Associate Professor in the ILR School's Department of Labor Relations, Law, and History, for the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Teaching Excellence. Veronica earned her Ph.D. in History at the University of Texas in 2009, with a Doctoral Portfolio in Mexican American Studies. She originally came to ILR as a Visiting Lecturer in 2010. She was hired as a tenure-track Assistant Professor in 2012 and was promoted to Associate Professor in 2020. She teaches courses on Immigration, Latina/o Studies, and American Labor and Working-Class History.

In each of her courses, Professor Martinez-Matsuda strives to create an environment for supportive learning and open intellectual exchange. She encourages her students to think critically about the past by, in her words, "equipping them with a wide range of interdisciplinary tools for understanding American History as a complex process involving diverse peoples, experiences, perspectives, and ideologies." She challenges her students to consider the present-day relevance and sociopolitical implications of the concepts they discuss in class, and she motivates them to become critically aware of issues affecting the world they live in and encourages them to play an active role in the community.

Professor Martinez-Matsuda teaches both required and elective undergraduate courses. Since coming to ILR, she has taught a core survey course, *Introduction to U.S. Labor and Working-Class History* (ILRLR 1100), required for first-year students and new transfers. Enrollment in the course varies from 50 to 70. It is a challenging course to teach because of its size, the fact that many of the students are new to Cornell, and because many come into the course having little knowledge of or interest in history. Her main objectives in the course are to familiarize students with the central historical themes shaping U.S. labor and working-class studies, and to strengthen students' methodological and analytical tools for research and writing. She is mindful of students' diverse skills and learning styles, and she utilizes films, TV clips, music, poetry, speech-

es, and novels, as well as standard historical monographs, to help enable her students to connect with the material in one form or another. One way she does this is to have each student write a 5-page “personal labor history,” to discuss some aspect of their own, or a family member’s, labor history as it relates to a topic in the course. In this assignment she reminds the students their experiences matter “in creating a diverse archive informing our national story.” Professor Martinez-Matsuda’s teaching evaluations for ILRLR 1100 are consistently excellent, and they have improved over time. Her scores are high on all fifteen questions on the ILR evaluation form. For example, on question 6 (“The instructor was willing to help students in office hours”), her score for Fall 2019, the last time she taught the course, was 4.86 (on a 5-point scale). In the last five times she has taught the course, her scores on question 8 (“The instructor is an excellent teacher”) range from 4.43 to an amazing 4.92, while those for question 15 (“This was an excellent course”) range from 4.23 to 4.76. These scores are not only high in an absolute sense, they also are consistently higher than the average scores for ILR required courses.

Professor Martinez-Matsuda also teaches a sophomore-level writing seminar on *Mexican Labor and Working-Class History in the United States* (ILRLR 2070). Each ILR student is required to take an advanced writing course. These are capped at 15 students, and her sections are always full. Professor Martinez-Matsuda develops assignments and in-class activities for the course that introduce students to major historical themes in Mexican working-class history and at the same time develop their analytical ability for historical research and writing. She uses a process she calls “reverse engineering,” in which small groups of students critique a reading assignment on the chalkboard in class, offering their critique, questions, and concerns about what works and what doesn’t work in the reading. Students learn how to “review” an author’s work, a skill they can use to analyze pitfalls or strengths in their own writing. Her evaluations for the course are outstanding. She has taught it five times, and three times every student who completed the student evaluation gave her the top score of 5 on the question: “the instructor is an excellent teacher.”

Professor Martinez-Matsuda also teaches an undergraduate elective course, *Immigrant America: Race and Citizenship in Modern U.S. History* (ILRLR 3065). Enrollment in this course, which originally was capped at 35, has ranged from 32 to 70 (in a year when she agreed to eliminate the cap to help fill student enrollment needs). The course is cross-listed with American Studies, Latino/a Studies, and Latin American

Studies. The course motivates students to think about immigration history in relation to current debates and policy proposals for immigration reform. The course's large size has forced Professor Martinez-Matsuda to be creative in generating classroom discussions. She developed a discussion-leader assignment in which designated students post questions for discussion on the course's Canvas website, and are encouraged to raise the questions in class. Her evaluation scores for this course are outstanding, and on a par with those for her other courses.

Professor Martinez-Matsuda also works with students outside of the classroom environment. In her time at ILR, she has served as the advisor of fifteen juniors and seniors doing credit internships with organizations including the International Labour Organization, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Bureau of National Affairs, IAPE Local 1096 TNG-CWA, the Cornell Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative, and Disney. She has supervised nine senior honors theses (four as Primary Advisor), two independent research projects, and three students participating in the ILR Undergraduate Research Fellows Project. She regularly volunteers to serve as a section leader/mentor for incoming first year students in the ILR Freshman Colloquium (IRLID 1500), a one-credit course that introduces students to the ILR School and current issues in the field of industrial and labor relations (broadly defined), and provides students with resources that will contribute to their success at Cornell. She also is involved in the education of graduate students, serving on four Ph.D. dissertation committees and three Master's Thesis committees. These students come from the fields of ILR, History, English, the Cornell Institute for Public Affairs (CIPA), and Latino/a Studies.

Professor Martinez-Matsuda's outstanding teaching and mentoring of students has been recognized both by multiple teaching awards and by a large number of glowing letters from former students. In 2013 she received a *Merrill Presidential Scholar Outstanding Educator* award, when one of Cornell's Merrill scholars chose her as the professor who had the greatest influence on their education. A Cornell faculty and student committee in 2016 selected her course syllabus for *Immigrant America* for inclusion in the College of Arts and Sciences Time Capsule buried in Klarman Hall, to be unearthed in 2065.

The ILR School has two awards for undergraduate teaching: the *MacIntyre Award for Exemplary Teaching and Advising*, and the *Robert N. Stern Award for Teaching and Mentoring*. The School's Teaching Advisory Committee (TAC), which I have chaired

since 2002, presented Professor Martinez-Matsuda with a MacIntyre Award in 2012 and a Stern Award in 2017. The fact that she won both of these awards as an assistant professor is extraordinary. Each year students submit essays nominating ILR faculty members for awards recognizing excellent teaching and mentoring. The TAC requests additional letters in support of the nominees, along with documents related to teaching from the nominated faculty members, and makes award decisions based on a careful reading of the submitted material. Professor Martinez-Matsuda's students describe her as passionate, inspiring, dedicated, caring, and creative, and stress that she is very willing to meet with students outside of the classroom. One student wrote that her "passion for the subjects that she teaches is definitely contagious and causes students to either *become* interested or to expand their interest in the material." Another described the class she took from Professor Martinez-Matsuda as "fantastic—the lectures were interesting and well organized and the expectations for assignments were clear," and added that she "gave phenomenal guidance in class, but also invited us sincerely and repeatedly to come to her office hours if we were having any trouble." A student who took her writing seminar thanked her for creating "an environment in the classroom where I felt comfortable sharing my perspective on issues," and added "her ability to facilitate discussion was remarkable." Another student from the writing seminar wrote that she "invested considerable effort in finding ways to help each person in the class become a stronger writer and scholar."

The student letters stress Professor Martinez-Matsuda's mentorship. One student wrote that her "impact on me as a student and person extended far beyond the classroom. Her advice and mentorship really impacted my ILR experience in a positive way. She always made herself available to students, and really make it apparent that she cared about us." Another wrote that "she enabled me to reduce my stress while still learning and completing assignments. She made me feel valued, safe, and at home in such a large school and taught me to take care of myself as a person first and foremost." Two comments sum up nicely how much her students value her. One student wrote that "Professor Martinez-Matsuda represents the ideal model of a professor—passionate and knowledgeable about the subjects that she teaches, but also willing and able to make a positive impact on her pupils outside of class." Another wrote that she "shows a sincere interest in the growth and welfare of her students. The way she presents herself inside and outside of class makes her stand out not just as a teacher, but as a mentor and friend."

Professor Martinez-Matsuda intentionally creates opportunities for her students to meet with her in informal settings to discuss course material, their experience at Cornell, and their future career plans. She makes use of the ILR “lunch fund” and Cornell’s “First-Year Dining Discussion Program” to host mealtime conversations with students enrolled in her courses. She currently is participating in the North Campus Faculty Programs as a Faculty Fellow for the Latino Living Center. As a fellow, she organizes and hosts various educational programs and social opportunities for students in residence. She often attends “house dinners” sponsored by various undergraduate residential centers. At a recent dinner she was asked to share her experience as a first-generation, low-income college student, and to describe how it is that she became a professor.

In sum, Professor Veronica Martinez-Matsuda is an outstanding classroom teacher whose passion for labor and working-class history inspires her students, and also is a superb mentor and advisor. Her dedication to her students is extraordinary. The ILR School has a culture of teaching excellence, and even here Professor Martinez-Matsuda stands out. She richly deserves a SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Teaching Excellence.